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Arizona Game and Fish Department

**Arizona Game and Fish Department****NEWS RELEASE**

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**Predator management plan for Kofa Mountains complex completed**

YUMA, Ariz., — In late May, officials with the Arizona Game and Fish Department completed a predation management plan for the Kofa Mountains complex, with the objective of helping to restore a desert bighorn sheep population that has been critical to the species' re-establishment and sustainment in the southwestern United States for half a century .

The Kofa complex herd was once one of the most robust herds in the nation and has been a critically important source of sheep for repatriating desert bighorn sheep to Arizona and other southwestern United States mountain ranges where the species has previously been driven to extinction or reduced to very low levels.

In November, officials from Arizona Game and Fish and the Kofa National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) announced that the triennial survey of the Kofa desert bighorn sheep herd indicated the population had fallen to an historic low estimate of 390 animals, representing a severe decline from the 812 animals estimated during the 2000 survey.

The plan -- which encompasses the Kofa, Castle Dome, New Water, South Plomosa, Tank, and Little Horn mountains of southwestern Arizona -- has been developed in accordance with the Arizona Game and Fish Commission Predation Management Policy to reduce mountain-lion-caused bighorn sheep mortality in an effort to restore the herd to a level that will support renewed transplanting activities.

Sheep transplants from the Kofa National Wildlife Refuge were suspended this year due to the severe population decline. As announced last November, wildlife experts attribute the decline to a variety of factors, including drought, predation, disease factors and human disturbance.

While predation may not be the primary cause of the initial decline in the bighorn population, research has shown the additive mortality caused by mountain lions has the ability to further depress or inhibit recovery of an already depressed bighorn herd.

At the time of the November release, it was estimated that at least five lions were spending enough time in the area to be considered “resident” lions, and five different lions have, in fact, been recorded by remote cameras at water catchments in the area. This represents a significant change from the transient lion population that has been the historic norm for this part of Arizona.

On June 5, under the auspices of the plan, department officials killed a young male lion in the Plomosa-New Water Mountains. When taken, this lion was found with two freshly killed bighorn sheep and one freshly killed mule deer. The lion had been preying on desert bighorn sheep in the Kofa Mountains and other surrounding mountain ranges for several months and had been documented in the killing of two other bighorn sheep. Added to his last kills, this one lion had killed enough bighorns to eliminate the estimated number of yearling sheep produced annually by 25 ewes.

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